

# **THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

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# The Textual Reliability of the New Testament: A Dialogue

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## OPENING REMARKS

### Bart D. Ehrman

Thank you very much; it's a privilege to be with you. I teach at the University of North Carolina. I'm teaching a large undergraduate class this semester on the New Testament, and of course, most of my students are from the South; most of them have been raised in good Christian families. I've found over the years that they have a far greater commitment to the Bible than knowledge about it. So this last semester, I did something I don't normally do. I started off my class of 300 students by saying the first day, "How many of you in here would agree with the proposition that the Bible is the inspired word of God?" *Voom!* The entire room raises its hand. "Okay, that's great. Now how many of you have read *The Da Vinci Code*?" *Voom!* The entire room raises its hand. "How many of you have read the entire Bible?" Scattered hands. "Now, I'm not telling you that *I* think God wrote the Bible. You're telling me that *you* think God wrote the Bible. I can see

why you'd want to read a book by Dan Brown. But if God wrote a book, wouldn't you want to see what he had to say?" So this is one of the mysteries of the universe.

The Bible is the most widely purchased, most thoroughly read, most broadly misunderstood book in the history of human civilization. One of the things that people misunderstand, of course—especially my nineteen-year-old students from North Carolina—is that when we're reading the Bible, we're not actually reading the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or Paul. We're reading translations of those words from the Greek of the New Testament. And something is always lost in translation. Not only that, we're not reading translations of the *originals* of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or Paul, because we don't have the originals of any of the books of the New Testament. What we have are copies made centuries later—in most instances, many centuries later. These thousands of copies that we have all differ from one another in lots of little ways, and sometimes in big ways. There are places where we don't know what the authors of the New Testament originally wrote. For some Christians, that's not a big problem because they don't have a high view of Scripture. For others, it's a big problem indeed. What does it mean to say that God inspired the words of the text if we don't have the words? Moreover, why should one think that God performed the miracle of inspiring the words in the first place if he didn't perform the miracle of preserving the words? If he meant to give us his very words, why didn't he make sure we received them?

The problem of not having the originals of the New Testament is a problem for everyone, not just for those who believe that the Bible was inspired by God. For all of us, the Bible is the most important book in the history of Western civilization. It continues to be cited in public debates over gay rights, abortion, over whether to go to war with foreign countries, over how to organize and run our society. But how do we interpret the New Testament? It's hard to know what the words of the New Testament mean if you don't know what the words were. And so [we have] the problem of textual criticism, the problem of trying to establish what the original authors wrote and trying to understand how these words got changed over time. The question is a simple one: "How did we get our New Testament?" I'll be spending my forty minutes trying to deal with that particular issue.

I'm going to start by giving an illustration of one of the books of the New Testament, the Gospel of Mark. Mark is our shortest Gospel. Many scholars think that Mark was the first Gospel to be written. We don't know *where* Mark was actually written. Scholars have different hypotheses about where it was written. Many scholars over the years have thought that maybe Mark was written in the city of Rome. Fair enough, let's say that the Gospel of Mark was written in the city of Rome. Somebody—we call him Mark, because we don't know his name and it doesn't make sense to call him Fred—sat down and wrote a Gospel. How did this Gospel get put in circulation? Well, it wasn't like it is today. Today, when an author writes a book, the book gets run off by electronic means and gets composed and produced and distributed so that you can pick up a copy of any book—*The Da Vinci Code*, for example—in a bookstore in New Orleans and another in California and another in New York, and it's going to be exactly the same book. Every word will be exactly the same because of our ways of producing books. But they didn't have these means of producing books in the ancient world. The only way to produce a book in the ancient world was to copy it by hand—one page, one sentence, one word, one letter at a time, by hand. Mass producing books in the ancient world meant some guy standing up in front dictating and three others writing down what he said. That was mass production, producing books three at a time. What happens when books are copied by hand? Try it sometime and you'll find out what happens: people make mistakes. Sometimes my students aren't convinced of this, so I tell them, "Go home and copy the Gospel of Matthew, and see how well you do." They're going to make mistakes.

So Mark's book gets copied by somebody in Rome who wants a copy. They don't want just one copy, they want another copy. So somebody makes a copy, and probably the person makes some mistakes. And then somebody copies the copy. Now, when you copy the copy, you don't know that the guy who copied it ahead of you made mistakes; you assume that he got it right. So when you copy his copy, you reproduce his mistakes—and you introduce your own mistakes. And then a third person comes along and copies the copy that you've made of a copy and reproduces the mistakes that you made and that your predecessor made, and he makes his own mistakes. And so it

goes. Somebody eventually visits the city of Rome—somebody from Ephesus, say—and decides, “We want a copy of that.” So he copies one of the copies. But he’s copying a copy that has mistakes in it, and he takes it back to Ephesus, and there in Ephesus, somebody copies it. And then somebody from Smyrna shows up and decides they want a copy. Well they copy the copy of the copy of the copy, and then somebody decides they want a copy in Antioch. And so they come, and they make a copy. Copies get made and reproduced. As a result, you get not just copies of the original but copies of the copies of the copies of the original.

The only time mistakes get corrected is when somebody is copying a manuscript and they think that the copy they’re copying has a mistake in it. And they try to correct the mistake. So they change the wording in order to make it correct. The problem is, there’s no way to know whether somebody who’s correcting a mistake has corrected it correctly. It’s possible that the person saw there was a mistake and tried to correct it but corrected it incorrectly, which means that now you’ve got three states of the text: the original text, the mistake, and the mistaken correction of the mistake. And then somebody copies that copy, and so it goes on basically for year after year after year after year. Mistakes get made en route, mistakes get copied and recopied, mistakes get corrected, but sometimes incorrectly, and so it goes.

Now, if we had the original copy of Mark, it wouldn’t matter, because we could look at the original and say, “Yeah, these guys made mistakes, but we’ve got the original.” But we don’t have the original. And we don’t have the first copy, or the copy of the copy. We don’t have copies of the copies of the copies of the copies. What do we have? We have copies that were made many, many years later.

The first copy of Mark that we have is called  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$ . It’s called  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  because it was the forty-fifth papyrus manuscript discovered in the modern age and cataloged. Papyrus is an ancient writing material, kind of like paper today, only it was made out of reeds that grew in Egypt, and they made writing material out of it. The oldest manuscripts we have of the New Testament are all written on papyrus.  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  dates from the third century, around the year 220 C.E. Mark probably wrote his Gospel around 60 or 70 C.E., so  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  dates to about 150

years later—but it is the earliest copy we have. By the time  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  was produced, people had been copying Mark year after year after year, making mistakes, reproducing mistakes, trying to correct mistakes, until we got our first copy. Our next copy doesn't come for years after that. Our first *complete* copy doesn't show up until around the year 350 C.E., 300 years after Mark was originally written. Starting with the fourth-century copies, we begin getting more copies. And there are, of course, lots of these later copies.

You hear sometimes that the New Testament is the best-attested book from the ancient world. That's absolutely right. We have more copies of the New Testament than we have of any other book from the ancient world. But you need to realize that the copies we have—by and large—are from later times, centuries after the copying process began. Now, you might say, “Well, look, you're talking about these mistakes and these copies, but God wouldn't let that happen.” Well, there's only one way to check, to see whether it could happen, that mistakes would be made. And that is by comparing the copies that survive with one another. It's striking that when you do that, you don't find two copies that are exactly alike. People were changing these manuscripts.

What can we say about these surviving copies of the New Testament? Let me give you just some data, some basic information. First of all, how many do we have? Well, we don't need to be overly precise for now. Basically, we have something like 5,500 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. As you know, the New Testament was originally written in Greek and was circulated in Greek. This is another thing I ask my students the first day of class. I give them this quiz the first day of class to see what their Bible knowledge is. The first question I ask is “How many books are there in the New Testament?” And that usually knocks off half the class right there. But then I ask what language it was written in, and about half of my students think the New Testament was written in Hebrew. Interesting. The other half thinks that it was written in English. So I think we're doing okay.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. We have some 5,500 manuscripts in Greek from over the ages. When I say we have these manuscripts, I don't mean we have 5,500 *complete* manuscripts. Some are just little fragments, but if you have a little fragment, you count that as the manuscript. Some manuscripts are small

fragments; some of them are enormous tomes that were produced in the Middle Ages and were found in libraries or monasteries. We have some 5,500 Greek manuscripts.

What are the dates of these manuscripts? Well, they range in dates from the second century up through the invention of printing. You would think that once Gutenberg had invented the printing press, people would stop writing things out by hand because now you can produce things with the printing press. As it turns out, even after the invention of the printing press, some people didn't think that was going to catch on. So they still copied things out by hand. Just like today, even though you have a computer, sometimes you use a number two pencil. Even after the invention of printing, there still was the copying of things by hand. So we actually have manuscripts that go down to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and even into the nineteenth century. So they span from the second century up to the nineteenth century.

The earliest manuscript we have of any kind is a manuscript called  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$ . Again, it's on papyrus, that's why it's called  $\mathfrak{P}$ . It's 52 because it's

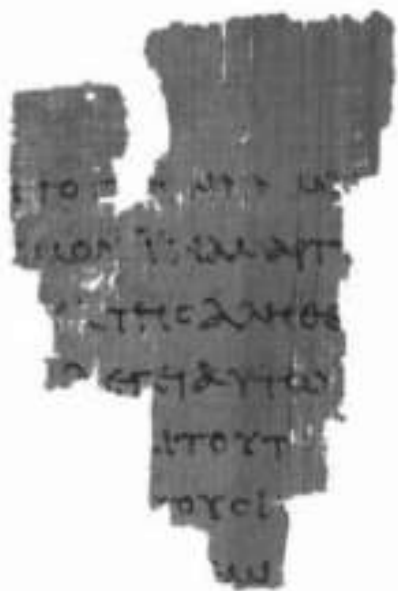


Fig. 1.1:  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$ .

the fifty-second papyrus manuscript discovered and cataloged. It measures 2.5 by 3.5 inches, about the size of a credit card. It's an interesting little piece. It was discovered by a scholar named C. H. Roberts, who was digging through the papyri collection at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England.

Some of these libraries have these bushels or envelopes filled with papyri that have been discovered by archaeologists. These archaeologists find these little pieces of things in garbage dumps, and they don't know what texts they are. Sometimes they're too small to read, so they throw them in an envelope or put them in a bushel, and it goes to some museum. And then someone working through them will notice something. In the 1930s, C. H. Roberts pulled out a little triangular



piece (since named  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$ ) and noticed that he could read some of the writing. For instance, the Greek word *oudenā* (οὐδενα), which means “no one,” and *hina*, which means “in order that.” He realized that it sounded like the trial of Jesus before Pilate in the Gospel of John, chapter 18. So you know that the people who do this kind of thing are pretty smart. This is what they do for a living. (Strangely enough, there’s a living in it.) There’s writing on the back of the piece as well, which is significant, because it shows that the piece isn’t from a scroll, but from a book—a book like we think of books, written on both sides of the page and then sewn together at the binding. This came from a book, and since it is written on the front and the back, you can figure out—since you can see about how wide the letters are—that you’ve got a top margin here and a left margin here. You can figure how many letters you need to get to the end of this line [in order] to get to the beginning of the next line like that. So you can figure out how long the lines were. And since you have writing on the back, you can figure out how many lines this thing would have originally been, so when you turn it over, you can get to the top of the writing on the back. So just with this little writing, you can figure out how many pages were in this manuscript originally, just from this little 2.5-by 3.5-inch piece.

The way you date these things isn’t by carbon-14 dating or something like that, but on the basis of handwriting analysis. The technical term is paleography (*paleo* meaning ancient, *graphie* meaning writing), a study of ancient writing. On the basis of paleography, scholars have dated this manuscript,  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$ , sometime to the first part of the second century—say, the year 125 or 130, plus or minus twenty-five years. It’s from the Gospel of John. John was probably written in the 90s, so this manuscript is only about thirty years away from the Gospel of John. It’s just a little piece, but it’s only thirty years away, which is pretty good. This is the oldest manuscript of the New Testament that we have. Would that we had more ancient manuscripts of this age! But we don’t. This is the oldest. Most of the copies we have are written much later than this. Of our 5,500-some Greek manuscripts, over 94 percent were made after the eighth century. In other words, 94 percent of our surviving manuscripts were produced 700 years or more after the originals. So we have a lot of manuscripts, but most of them are not very close to the date of the originals. Most of them are from the Middle Ages.



How many mistakes are in these manuscripts? Scribes copied the books of the New Testament. Most tried to do a pretty good job of reproducing what they were copying. They didn't try to make mistakes, but sometimes mistakes happen. So how many mistakes are there in the 5,500 manuscripts we have? This did not seem to be a very big problem to scribes who were actually copying the texts in the Middle Ages. Some scribes knew there were mistakes, but I'm not sure they realized how big the problem was—that there were a lot of mistakes.

It wasn't until about 300 years ago that scholars started realizing the enormity of the problem. There was a scholar named John Mill, who I believe is unrelated to the Victorian John Stuart Mill. John Mill was an Oxford scholar who in the year 1707—almost exactly 300 years ago—produced a printed edition of the Greek New Testament that he called the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, the Greek New Testament. This was an interesting book because of how it was constructed. Mill printed the lines of the Greek New Testament on the top of the page, and then on the bottom of the page, he indicated places where manuscripts that he examined had different readings for the verses that he cited at the top. Mill had access to about a hundred manuscripts, and he looked at how the church fathers had quoted the New Testament in places, and he looked at how different ancient versions of the New Testament—ancient translations into Latin, Syriac, and Coptic—presented the New Testament. He looked at all these materials—devoting thirty years of his life to this—and then produced his *Novum Testamentum Graece*, presenting the Greek text at the top and indicating some of the places where the manuscripts differed from one another at the bottom.

To the shock and dismay of many of his readers, John Mill's apparatus indicated 30,000 places of variation among the manuscripts he had discovered. Thirty thousand places where the manuscripts had differences! This upset a lot of John Mill's readers. Some of his detractors claimed that he was motivated by the devil to render the text of the New Testament uncertain. His supporters pointed out that he actually hadn't invented these 30,000 differences; he just noticed that they existed. He was just pointing out the facts that are there for anyone to see. Moreover, as it turns out, Mill did not cite everything that he found. He found far more variations than he cited in his apparatus.

So that was John Mill in 1707, 300 years ago, looking at a hundred manuscripts. What about today? What can we say about the number of differences in our manuscripts today? As it turns out, it is very hard to say exactly how many differences there are in our surviving manuscripts. We have far more manuscripts than Mill had. He had a hundred; we have 5,500. So we have fifty-five times as many manuscripts as he had. And this may seem a little weird, but in this field, the more evidence you have, the harder it is to figure out what you're doing, because the more evidence you have, the more manuscripts you have, the more differences you have. So, it turns out, half the time, evidence just complicates the picture. So we have 5,500 manuscripts. How many differences are there? The reality is, we don't know, because no one has been able to count them all, even with the development of computer technology. It is probably easiest simply to put it in comparative terms. There are more differences in our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament. That's a lot. There are more differences in our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.

Some scholars will tell you there are 200,000 differences, some will tell you 300,000 differences, some say 400,000. I don't know. It's something like that; between 300,000 and 400,000 would be my guess. But what do we make of that fact?

But the first thing to say about these 300,000 or 400,000 differences is that most of them don't matter for anything. They are absolutely irrelevant, immaterial, unimportant, and a lot of them you can't even reproduce in English translations from the Greek. As it turns out, the majority of mistakes you find in manuscripts show us nothing more than that scribes in antiquity could spell no better than my students can today. The scribes can be excused on this; they didn't have spell-check. (I just don't understand students who have spell-check on their computer but have spelling mistakes in a paper. I mean the computer tells you! It's in red! This word is wrong!) If scribes had had spell-check, we might have 50,000 mistakes instead of 400,000, but scribes didn't have spell-check. And half the time, scribes frankly didn't care how they spelled things. We know that scribes often didn't care how they spelled things because sometimes the same word appears within a line or two, and the scribe spells it differently in the two places. It

also turns out that scribes didn't have dictionaries. Spelling wasn't a big deal for most of these people. So that's one kind of mistake, which of course doesn't matter for anything. What other kinds of mistakes do you have?

Often scribes will leave out things, often by accident—not planning to leave something out. They just mess up because they miss something on the page. Sometimes they leave out a word, sometimes a sentence, and sometimes an entire page. Sometimes scribes were incompetent, sometimes they were sleepy, and sometimes they were bored.

You can see how it would happen with this illustration from Luke 12:8-10:

And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others,  
The Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God;  
But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the  
angels of God  
And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man . . .

And it goes on to say that blasphemy “against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.” Notice that the second and third lines end in the same words, “before the angels of God.” What scribes would sometimes do is copy the second line, “will acknowledge before the angels of God,” they look at the page, and then they copy it. Then their eyes go back to the page and inadvertently go to the [end of the] *third* line, which ends the same way, “before the angels of God.” The scribes think this was the line that they had just copied. So they keep copying with the following words, and the result of that is that they leave out the entire second line. So in some manuscripts, you have “will acknowledge before the angels of God,” followed by “And everyone who speaks a word against the Son.” They’ve left out the middle line. You see how that works? That kind of eye-skip goes under a technical name. An eye-skip is called *parablepsis*. *Parablepsis* happens because the words at the end of the line are the same. Lines ending with the same words is called *homoeoteleuton*. So, this kind of mistake, I try to teach my students, is *parablepsis* occasioned by *homoeoteleuton*.

This, then, is another accidental kind of mistake. Accidental mistakes are exceedingly common in our manuscripts, in part because

some scribes were completely inept. My favorite example of an inept scribe was a fourteenth-century scribe of a manuscript that's called MS<sup>109</sup>. Now this example is a little bit complicated. MS<sup>109</sup> is copying the genealogy of Jesus in Luke. There are two genealogies of Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew has a genealogy that takes Jesus back to Abraham, the father of the Jews. And Luke has a genealogy that takes Jesus back to Adam, as in Adam and Eve. This is an amazing genealogy when you think about it. I have an aunt who is a genealogist, who has traced my family line back to the *Mayflower*. The *Mayflower*? Pfoo! Adam and Eve! We're talking serious genealogy here!

The genealogy begins with Joseph and works backward. Joseph is supposedly the father of Jesus, and Joseph is son of so-and-so, who is son of so-and-so, son of so-and-so, who is son of David, who is son of so-and-so, who is the son of so-and-so, who is the son of Abraham, who is the son of so-and-so who is the son of Adam, son of God. So it actually traces Jesus' genealogy back to God, which is even better than tracing back to Adam. It's an amazing genealogy.

The scribe of MS<sup>109</sup> in the fourteenth century was copying a manuscript that had Luke's genealogy in two columns, but the second column didn't go all the way down the page. And instead of copying the first column and then the second column, the scribe copied across the columns, leading to some very interesting results. In this genealogy, in MS<sup>109</sup>, the father of the human race is not Adam, but some guy named Pherez, and as it turns out, God is the son of Aram. And so it goes.

There are all sorts of accidental mistakes in the manuscripts, and probably most of the mistakes we have in our manuscripts are accidental. In these cases, it is fairly easy to figure out what happened. Not a big problem. There are other mistakes in our manuscripts, though, that appear to be intentional. It's hard to say absolutely that a scribe intentionally changed the text because the scribe is not around for us to ask, "Did you do this on purpose?" But there are some changes that really look as though they had to be done on purpose. I'll give you a few examples of these because they tend to be rather important. These are the ones that most textual critics spend their time talking about. These big changes are the kind of things that if somebody has a New Testament class with me, they ought to know about by the time

the semester is over. First is the story that is probably the favorite story among Bible readers and has been for many years, the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery. One of my reasons for thinking that this is people's favorite Bible story is because it's in every Hollywood movie about Jesus. You simply can't make a Jesus movie without this story. Even Mel Gibson, wanting to do a movie about Jesus' last hours, had to sneak this scene in as a flashback. So you're familiar with the story: The Jewish leaders drag this woman before Jesus and say, "She has been caught in the act of adultery, and according to the Law of Moses, we're supposed to stone her to death. What do you say we should do?" This is setting up a trap for Jesus, because if Jesus says, "Well, yeah, stone her to death," he's breaking his teachings of love and mercy. If he says, "No, forgive her," then he's breaking the Law of Moses. So what's he going to do? Well, Jesus, as you know, has a way of getting out of these traps in the New Testament. In this instance, he stoops down and starts writing on the ground. He then looks up and says, "Let the one without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." He stoops down again and continues writing, and one by one, the Jewish leaders start feeling guilty for their own sins, and they leave until Jesus looks up, and it's just the woman there. And he says to her, "Woman, is there no one left here to condemn you?" And she says, "No, Lord, no one." And Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

This is a beautiful story, and it's rightly one of the favorite stories of readers of the Gospels of the New Testament—filled with pathos, teaching a very powerful lesson about the need for forgiveness and about not casting the first stone. The difficulty, as many of you know, is that this story, in fact, was not originally in the Bible. It is now found in John 7–8 (part of the end of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8), but it's not found in our oldest and best manuscripts of the Gospel of John. And the vocabulary used in this story is unlike what you find elsewhere in the Gospel of John, and when you actually look at this story in its context, it seems to be badly placed in its context. It interrupts the flow of the context.

Scholars for centuries have realized that this story does not belong in the Gospel of John, and it is not found in any other Gospel. You'll still find it in a lot of your English Bibles, but in most English Bibles,

the editors will put brackets around it to tell you that it may be a really old and popular story, but it wasn't originally part of the Gospel. That's a pretty big change of the text. My assumption is that however that story got in there, it wasn't by pure accident. It might have been an accident, but I think somebody came up with a story and put in there. My hunch actually is that somebody found it in the margin of a manuscript. A scribe was copying his manuscript of John, and knowing the story, he decided to write it out in the margin. The next scribe came along and saw the story in the margin and thought that the scribe before him had inadvertently left out a story, so this second scribe put the story in the text itself. And the next scribe came along and copied that manuscript and left it in. Pretty soon, the story was propagated as being part of the Gospel of John, even though it originally was not part of the Gospel of John. That's a pretty big change, and I assume it is probably in some sense intentional.

Another example, a big example, is the last twelve verses of Mark. Mark, as I was saying earlier, is the shortest Gospel. It is probably my favorite Gospel. Mark doesn't beat you over the head with his theology. Mark is very subtle, and for that reason, I really like it. One of the best parts of Mark is how it ends. Jesus has been condemned to death, he's been crucified, he's been buried. On the third day, the women go to the tomb to anoint his body, but when they arrive, Jesus is not in the tomb. There's a young man there who tells the women that Jesus has been raised and that the women are to go tell Peter and the disciples that Jesus will precede them and meet them in Galilee. And then the text says, "But the women fled from the tomb and didn't say anything to anyone, for they were afraid." Period. That's it! That's where it ends.

You say, "Ai, yai, yai! How can it end there? Doesn't Jesus show up? Don't the disciples go to Galilee? Don't they see him?" You're left hanging. Well, scribes got to this passage that they were copying out, and they got to chapter 16:8, and it said, "The women fled from the tomb and didn't say anything to anyone, for they were afraid." And the scribes said, "Ai, yai, yai! How can it end there?" So the scribes added an ending. In your Bibles today, you'll find an additional twelve verses in which the women *do* go tell the disciples. The disciples do go to Galilee. Jesus does meet them there, and Jesus tells the disciples that they are to go out and make converts. And he tells them those



who believe in him will be able to handle snakes and that they'll be able to drink deadly poison, and it won't harm them. And then Jesus ascends to heaven. So now the Gospel has an ending that's more familiar. This ending, by the way, is used in my part of the world. We have these Appalachian snake handlers that base their theology on these last twelve verses. I've always thought that somebody in the ambulance on the way to the hospital ought to maybe tell one of these guys, "You know, actually those verses weren't originally in there."

The verses are not found in our two best and oldest manuscripts of Mark. The writing style of these verses is different from the rest of Mark. When you read it in Greek, there's a rough transition between that story and the preceding story. Most scholars, then, are pretty convinced that either Mark ended with verse 8 or the ending of Mark got lost—that we lost the last page. I personally think that it ended with verse 16:8—that the women didn't tell anybody. The reason is that throughout Mark's Gospel, unlike the other Gospels, the disciples never can figure out who Jesus is. Jesus is always frustrated with his disciples in Mark's Gospel. He keeps asking, "Don't you understand? Don't you get it?" At the end, they still don't get it. They're never told.

Moreover, it's interesting that in Mark's Gospel, whenever Jesus performs a miracle, he tells people, "Don't tell anybody." Or he'll heal somebody and say, "Don't tell anybody." Or he'll cast out demons, and he'll tell them, "Don't say anything." And then at the end, when somebody is told to say something, they don't say anything. When they're told not to say anything, they do say things. So I think Mark is interesting and it ended with 16:8.

I'll give you another example of a major change. Jesus heals a leper in Mark 1. The leper comes up to him, asks to be healed, and Jesus says, "I am willing." The text says, "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" (Mk. 1:41, NIV) In some of our earlier manuscripts, though, instead of saying, "feeling compassion for the man," it says "Jesus got angry" and reached out his hand and touched him and healed him. He got angry? That's a big difference.

Well, which did the text originally say? Did it say that Jesus felt compassion or that he got angry? Now, you have to imagine that you're a scribe copying this text. If you're a scribe copying it, and you have the



word in front of you that Jesus “felt compassion,” are you likely to change it to say that he “got angry”? On the other hand, if you came across the word saying Jesus “got angry,” would you be likely to change it to say that “he felt compassion”? If you put it that way, the latter is the more likely possibility, which is why a lot of scholars think, in fact, that originally this text said that Jesus got angry and that scribes changed it to say he felt compassion. But what did he get angry at? That’s the big question. But my point is that you can’t interpret what the words *mean* if you don’t know what the words *are*. Textual critics try to figure out what the words are.

Is the text of the New Testament reliable? The reality is there is no way to know. If we had the originals, we could tell you. If we had the first copies, we could tell you. If we had copies of the copies, we could tell you. We don’t have copies in many instances for hundreds of years after the originals. There are places where scholars continue to debate what the original text said, and there are places where we will probably never know.

Thank you very much.

## OPENING REMARKS

### Daniel B. Wallace

Bart, as I expected, your presentation was energetic, informative, and entertaining. It was vintage Bart Ehrman. What many folks here probably don’t realize is that you and I have known each other for more than twenty-five years. Our academic paths, in fact, have been remarkably similar. I met you when you were just starting out in your doctoral program at Princeton. Six months later, you were *cruising* through the program while I was *driving* a truck to make ends meet. Similar activities. The year you completed your doctorate, I was just starting mine. Seven years later, in 1993, when you wrote your magnum opus, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, I began thinking about my dissertation, which should soon be published. But by the time you wrote your fifteenth book, I had already finished my fifteenth article. And when you were nominated to be Man of the Year for *Time* magazine, after writing *Misquoting Jesus*—when the name Bart Ehrman became a household word—most of my students knew my name. Yes, we have a lot in common.